Real Estate Taxpayers Ass'n., Passaic County
Clifton, N. J. - October 17, 1962

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TRENTON, NEW JERSEY

Dwight R. G. Palmer
New Jersey State Highway Commissioner

Mr. Toastmaster, Congressman Joelson, Senator Grossi, Distinguished Guests and Fellow Taxpayers:

The underlying influence which prompted me to accept the privilege of addressing you -- and I assure you it is a privilege -- is my deep conviction that in order to have a better community, a better state -- and if you will, a better nation -- all of us as citizens must contribute more of our time and our energies to the welfare of the area in which we reside and carry on our gainful pursuits.

Whether the subject be highways, area planning, parking or whatnot, our type of society is too prone to expect the appointment of committees and a volume of fanfare to accomplish the end desired. This phenomenon has not in the past been too productive. You know there is an old saying that the most effective committee ever appointed consisted of two -- one of whom was absent.

However, my sincere respects to those of you who have so faithfully given of your time and energy to advance the cause of your community. More power to you!

Now, in breaking down the subject of my visit, I will confine myself to realities and the somewhat predictable future rather than venture into the outerspace of prophesy, for I possess neither occult powers, nor if you will, a crystal ball.

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Only yesterday the State Highway Department received bids on completion of the Lincoln Street Bridge project, involving the City of Paterson, the Borough of West Paterson and the Borough of Totowa. As you know, this new four-lane

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structure - twice as wide as the old bridge which has been closed since 1958 - is a 50-50 project between the County and the Federal Government. The bids received yesterday are still being reviewed, but I can tell you now it appears that the total cost of the bridge, including the already completed substructure, will be under our engineering estimates. Of greater importance to you, perhaps, is the fact that the new bridge will be carrying traffic by Memorial Day next year.

We realize that the City of Passaic is also vitally interested in a new bridge at Paulison Avenue and the concept has been aired that such a structure could be used for one-way traffic, with the existing bridge carrying traffic in the other direction. Our engineers are exploring the possibility of tying this project in with Route 21 but, in all frankness, I must report that it is a very difficult problem.

The fact that solutions exist to even the most complicated problems, however, is evidenced in the recent agreement regarding elimination of very hazardous grade crossings and removal of the Erie-Lackawanna Railroad tracks in the City of Passaic. Agreement on this project, announced by Governor Hughes three and a half months ago, required many months of patient negotiation with the Railroad, the State Public Utilities Commission, and the City. As a result, the PUC put up the sum of $1,200,000 for work during this fiscal year, with an additional $330,000 or so to be allocated during 1963-64.

The Railroad has acted promptly to carry out its part of the program. A contract has been awarded for improvement of the Newark Branch, which is to be elevated over Getty and Main Avenues, and the passengers who use this facility are now being transported by bus between Paterson

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Station and South Paterson so that the work can go forward to completion by April 1st. I am told that the tracks should be out of Passaic by July 1st next and that such portions of the former railroad right-of-way as are not needed for Route 21, on the alignment approved by the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads, should be in the hands of the City.

A most important project for this area, one which has been uppermost in all our minds for years, is the "peripheral highway" for Paterson. Some of you were present, I know, when the Highway Department presented its plans for this route at a public hearing last December. You will be interested to learn that the Federal Bureau of Public Roads has approved the general location of the new route, as set forth at the hearing, and that Consultants are engaged in detailed engineering.

It is anticipated that this "halo" around your area will cost between $17 and $20 million to build, which will be a 4.8 mile freeway, and that the construction could take two years after final plans are adopted. When completed - and we are presently working with a 1965 target date - it will carry 70,000 vehicles a day in Paterson and be of great benefit to that City's over-all urban renewal efforts.

The Highway Department is well aware that it is extremely difficult to construct a new highway in any urban area without causing inconvenience to some residents and businesses. Our goal is to minimize that inconvenience and to provide a facility which will do the most good for the economic life of the entire area by promoting the safe and convenient movement of people and goods.

To that end, you may rest assured that any and all objections to any feature of this route, as well as all other new projects, will be carefully reviewed by the Highway Department and every effort made to resolve the difficulties we all know will arise. In the end, however, I am sure you can understand that the decision must rest with the agency responsible for carrying out the work.

A point that is frequently hard to get across to persons adversely affected by a new highway is the tremendous economic benefit that is sure to result from creation of a new transportation artery. When we were making our studies of the Passaic-Bergen Expressway, Interstate Route 80, for example, the engineers calculated the savings in time, convenience, safety and so forth would amount to an average of $15 million a year for the stretch from Route 23 to the George Washington Bridge. The segment from Route 23 east to the Garden State Parkway is expected to produce benefits amounting to an average of $3,300,000 a year over 30 years -- that is, a total of $100 million in that period.

As real property owners, you should take comfort in the Highway Department's experience that construction of new or improved highways, anywhere in the State, inevitably produces a rise in real estate values. It is a "shot in the arm" to the economy, there can be no doubt of that.

Although highways are the main concern of the Department, the fact is that all facets of transportation are inescapably interwoven, particularly in this metropolitan area. The commuter railroads must be sustained and

their financial "facts of life" improved, otherwise all of us shall sink into a bog of hopelessly mired transportation.

It is interesting to note that the effort to assist the railroads by reducing operating costs while maintaining and improving essential service sometimes produces rather substantial "fringe benefits."

For example,the Erie-Lackawanna Railroad can improve its operations by re-routing Boonton Line traffic over its Greenwood Lake Branch. But this move also makes Railroad right-of-way available to the Highway Department for Interstate Route 80 between Union Avenue in Totowa and 21st Avenue in Paterson at considerable savings.

It is this kind of coordination and planning which is necessary to solve the transportation problems of all of our urban areas. What we term "stretching the dollar" to its elastic limits. All of you are aware, simply by viewing the path of demolition for Interstate 80 through Paterson, of the impact of the new freeways we are striving, with all diligence, to bring to reality. I would like, however, to give you a final statistic: in the 37 years between the inception of the State Highway Department in 1917 and the year 1954, approximately $44 million was spent on highway construction, maintenance and highway aid to local governments in Passaic County. More than that amount has already been spent in the past 8 years in this County.

Some of you may have read press reports regarding some information I recently had the privilege of presenting to the State Tax Policy

Commission regarding future financial requirements for transportation. While the figures are the "property" of the Commission, it is no secret that the problems of the Counties and Municipalities were given prominent mention. To those of you who have been justifiably depressed by the local tax burden on real estate, due to the need for more schools, more police and firemen, more roads and just about more everything, let me say that we are well aware of your problem and, for our part, are convinced that any long-range solution to the State's transportation needs must take this into account in the form of a State Aid Program for Roads which is at the same time more generous from a fiscal standpoint and more realistic from the angle of needs.

Just one more note. Don't get discouraged because you see shopping centers taking business away from local stores. If local businesses would use their heads -- reshape their store fronts and interiors -- provide parking in the rear of their stores and do a selling job instead of bewailing the present success of these highway shopping areas, some believe you could swing back the pendulum. Mind you the time may come when the housewife will lose interest in trying to locate her car among 8,000 others on a rainy day. In the old days, buyers were top dog in most establishments. The modern concept is, get top-grade sales people. Your customer is the important one, not the firm you buy from - the wholesaler or manufacturer.

In closing, my sincere thanks for your invitation to visit with you. Capitalize on your opportunities and watch this area grow.

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